

Veterans break new ground

Program trains them for jobs in 'green' construction industry

BY MARTIN C. EVANS

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At a construction site in Huntington Station, Diana Jackson looked over at her husband and smiled.

Her husband, an Army veteran, was elated about the prospect of returning to work. He'd been unemployed for years after suffering knee, foot and head injuries during a mortar attack in Iraq.

"To see him excited about something like this is amazing," Jackson said. "Seeing him so proud and back on his feet — having the excitement of getting up every morning and having somewhere to go — it means a lot."

Rashaun Jackson, 37, of Deer Park, is one of 10 veterans nearing completion of a five-week, Long Island-based program that provides training for "green" construction jobs.

Marking Earth Day, VetsBuild broke ground yesterday in Huntington Station on a group home for veterans that will require little or no external energy for light and heat. Jackson and fellow trainees will assist in the construction.

VetsBuild, administered by United Way of Long Island, aims to help crack what has



VetsBuild participant Rashaun Jackson holds his son Christopher, 3, while wife Diana holds their daughter Christina, 4, at a groundbreaking ceremony in Huntington Station.

been a tough jobs market for veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan.

Although employment has improved among veterans nationwide, joblessness among veterans between the ages of 18 and 29 remains about 20 percent in Suffolk County, according to Vanessa Pugh, chief deputy commissioner for the Suffolk Department of Labor, Licensing and Con-

sumer Affairs.

VetsBuild combines classroom learning with hands-on, construction-site training, teaching veterans skills ranging from installing solar heating systems to using infrared technology to detect thermal leaks.

Administrators for the program say those skills will become increasingly valuable as demand for energy-effi-

cient homes rises.

Fabrizio Bustos, a former Army tank commander who leads the program, said at least two of the current trainees already have been offered construction jobs paying about \$15 per hour.

Others will use the program as a steppingstone to more specialized training that should lead to higher-paying jobs, he said.

Rashaun Jackson served in a military police unit in Baghdad during a 2004-2005 deployment. Injuries he suffered there, including concussive brain injuries, made his transition back to civilian life difficult after he left the Army as a specialist in 2008.

The economy didn't make finding a job any easier.

The frustration he experienced worsened the anxiety he felt due to combat-related post-traumatic stress disorder.

But his cutting-edge training has given him a new, positive outlook.

"It was a lot to wrap your head around, because everything seemed to be coming at me at 100 mph," he said of the program. "But I'm pretty optimistic now, because the field is so new. It's given me renewed confidence."

Josh Price, right, is a business associate of Huntington Town Board member Gene Cook, left, who tried to get Price seats on two different town boards. The



Cook's nondisclosure

BY DEBORAH S. MORRIS

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Huntington Town Board member Gene Cook asked that

tion to appoint attorney Josh Price of Commack to the board of assessment review. The measure failed to get support and was not voted on.

"It was a novice mistake," Cook said yesterday of the non-

tion of running for town board. The town board member on Tuesday